NEW YORK – The events of last Monday suggest that Don King may be forced to rethink his decision to stage his Jan. 7 'Undisputed' card in the Theater at Madison Square Garden. The promoter might have to move the fight into the main arena just so he can accommodate Zab Judah's posse.

Brunch was served on schedule at 11 am, but an hour and fifteen minutes would elapse before Judah and his noisy entourage appeared, immediately doubling the size of the gathering. If this had been a more circumspect sport like, say, golf, Zab might have been disqualified for missing his tee time, but in this case it was probably just as well that the Brooklyn contingent showed up late. If they'd been on time there'd have been no food left for the press.

Judah, the undisputed welterweight champion, will face one of his mandatory challengers, top-rated WBC contender Carlos Baldomir, in the main event of the Showtime card. The evening will also produce another 'undisputed' when WBA/WBC champ Jean-Marc Mormeck of France meets IBF titlist O'Neil Bell in the co-feature.

(Yet a third world title will be on the line that night, when IBF light-flyweight champion Will Grigsby defends against Mexican Ulises "Archie" Solis.)

Baldomir is a rugged-looking Argentine with a modest record of 41-9-6. He hasn't lost since 1998 (though there have been a couple of intervening draws), and ostensibly earned his title shot by upsetting Miguel Rodriguez in a Chicago eliminator back in May, though it probably didn't hurt his chances that New York attorney (and former King publicist) Mike Marley is Baldomir's "advisor."

"Play your cards right," Marley's successor Alan Hopper was told, "and ten years down the line you might get one of your fighters on one of Don's cards."

Baldomir is a rugged-looking boxer who claims fealty to the late middleweight champion Carlos Monzon, another native of Santa Fe. It could be that he is a late bloomer like Monzon, who suffered all three of his career losses (and – count 'em – nine draws) before he left Argentina, but went on to win and defend the undisputed middleweight title a then-record 14 times, but physically Baldomir calls to mind not Monzon, but another Argentinian of more modest gifts, Juan Domingo Roldan.

"Baldomir is a fighter," Judah (34-2), reminded the audience. "He's the No. 1 mandatory so you have to respect him for that, but at the same time I'm here to do what I do best and that is destroy. I'm here to take on the best. I am not here to run from anyone, I only take on the best. I do not run from anyone. I want the best and nothing less."

Judah may have inherited part of Mike Tyson's considerable entourage, but he proceeded to demonstrate that his knowledge of boxing lore and history isn't quite up to Mike's. In proclaiming

the 147-pound class "the division everyone wants to be undisputed at," he ticked off a short list of former welterweight champions that included Marvin Hagler, who never had a welterweight fight in his life.

The winner of the Mormeck-Bell fight will become the first undisputed cruiserweight champion since Evander Holyfield in 1988. Mormeck (31-2), who solidly outpointed Wayne Braithwaite in Worcester, Mass., last April to add the WBC title to the WBA belt he already owned, plans to add a third championship. Bell (25-1-1) is Jamaican-born, currently lives in Atlanta, and owns a win over Holyfield. (William Holyfield, who he stopped in the first round his pro debut; six weeks later in his second pro fight, O'Neil was knocked out by somebody named Mohammed Ben Guesmia in South Carolina.

Presumably he has improved since.

"Mormeck does not back up," said Bell. "He will come to me. It's an excellent way to start the year, and you can expect explosions. Most of my opponents have ducked and dodged me, but Mormeck has come and put up the belts."

"We'll be ready," proclaimed Mormeck, who cited Holyfield – Evander, not William – as "a great example to me."

Although Judah, a native New Yorker, will be topping the bill in his hometown, King wisely opted to put the Jan. 7 event in the 6,000-seat Theatre. Zab will bring a sizeable contingent, but unless we badly miss our guess, most of them won't be paying customers.

The event will also celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Showtime Championship Boxing, and Judah is right about this much: It promises to be a good start to the New Year.